



DAVID BOHRER/THE WHITE HOUSE

President George W. Bush's anticipated visit to India this year would be the fifth state visit to New Delhi by a U.S. President. It is aimed at enhancing the relationship with India that has developed through reciprocal meetings between American and Indian leaders and cooperation between the two peoples for more than 50 years.

Steps Forward

By LAURINDA KEYS LONG

The first U.S. presidential visit was in 1959, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower spent four days in India during a 19-day, 11-nation peace tour, at that time the longest trip ever made by an American President. His wide smile answered chants of "Eisenhower zindabad" from a joyous crowd of 1.5 million Indians lining the motorcade route from Palam Airport to Rashtrapati Bhavan. All of New Delhi was decorated with lights and 25,000 American flags. In their enthusiasm, the friendly crowds swamped the motorcade, stuffing garlands through the window of the car carrying the President and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

President Eisenhower—who spent his boyhood in a farming area—visited villagers near Agra and met with farmers Kiran Singh and Tikam Singh. "It is my earnest hope and prayer that through the efforts of you and the other millions of farmers, India may prosper and progress," the President said in personal notes to them.

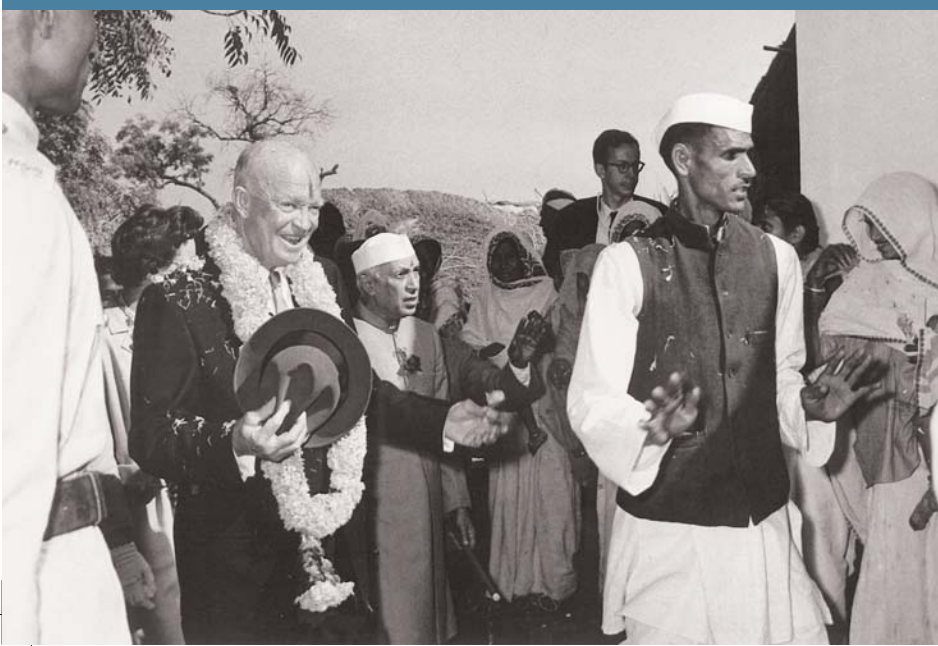
Speaking to the largest crowd ever gathered,

Right: President Richard M. Nixon with acting President Mohammad Hidayatullah in New Delhi in July 1969.

Top: President George W. Bush with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the White House lawns in July 2005.

Far right: President Lyndon B. Johnson and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the White House in March 1966.

Left: President Dwight D. Eisenhower with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (to his right) at a village near Agra in December 1959.



President Harry S. Truman greets Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in Washington in October 1949. Also shown are Vijayalakshmi Pandit (far left) and Indira Gandhi (far right).

Courtesy INDIAN EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, D.C.



President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the White House garden in November 1961.



President Richard M. Nixon and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the White House in November 1971.

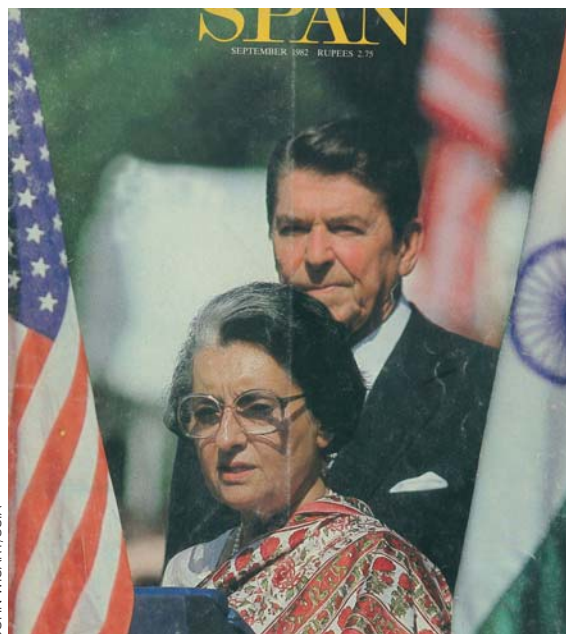


Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru plays holi with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in March 1962.



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Far left: Prime Minister Morarji Desai and President Jimmy Carter at the White House in June 1978.

Left: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with President Ronald Reagan at the White House in July 1982.

Below: Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt tries her hand at a spinning wheel during her visit to New Delhi in February 1952.

up to that time, at the Ram Lila Grounds in New Delhi, President Eisenhower said, “I see in the magnificent spectacle before me a soul-stirring testimonial by half a million of India’s people to America, a sister democracy—and to the cause for which both India and America stand: The cause of peace and friendship in freedom.... We who are free—and who prize our freedom

above all other gifts of God and nature—must know each other better; trust each other more; support each other.”

During the 110 hours of President Eisenhower’s visit, said Prime Minister Nehru, there took place “a memorable event which will be recorded in the history of our times...when two great countries opened their minds and hearts to

each other.”

That opening established the foundation for the decades that followed. Despite serious differences that developed on important international issues—even siding with opposite parties in wartime—the roots of joint commitments to democracy, human rights and the rule of law have carried the two great countries forward step



by step toward a close and valuable friendship.

Seven Indian prime ministers have made state visits to Washington, D.C. Each meeting has been marked by frank discussion and steps toward understanding. This process culminated in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's state visit last July, when he addressed the U.S. Congress and resolved with President George W. Bush that India and the United States would build a global partnership based on cooperation in defense, fighting terrorism, development of clean energy supplies, civilian nuclear energy, space exploration, disaster relief, agricultural development, democracy, human development, freer trade, economic opportunities and the battle against HIV/AIDS.

"Because of our shared values, the relationship between our two countries has never been stronger," President Bush said at a White House news conference with Prime Minister Singh. "We're working together to make our nations more secure, deliver a better life to our citizens and advance the cause of peace and freedom throughout the world."

Prime Minister Nehru made the first such journey, meeting President Harry S Truman at the White House in 1949. At that time, Nehru also met Eisenhower, who was then the president of Columbia University, which bestowed a doctor of laws degree on the Indian leader. Prime Minister Nehru went again in 1956, to visit President Eisenhower, tour his farm and broadcast a radio address to Americans. "No Indian can forget that in the days of our struggle for freedom, we received from your country a full measure of sympathy and support," he said. Nehru also paid his respects to Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and hosted her when she came to India in 1952.

But it was Jacqueline Kennedy, 10 years later, who became the first First Lady, wife of a sitting President, to visit India. Hillary Rodham Clinton, in March 1995, was the only other First Lady to represent the President on a visit to India.

Accompanied by her sister, Princess Lee Radziwill, Mrs. Kennedy stayed two days at the home of Prime Minister Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi. She fed bamboo shoots to the Himalayan pandas in the gardens and rode a horse belonging to President Rajendra Prasad's bodyguards. She also visited craftsmen, donated American paintings and music records, and made hospitalized children

laugh and clap when she poured out a bag of American sweets.

Mrs. Gandhi, representing her father, met with President Kennedy the next month, just as he announced a high point in 11 years of Indian-American economic collaboration: three loans for hydroelectric and thermal power stations, financing of Indian imports of critically needed industrial commodities and fertilizers, and a \$20 million loan to the Industrial Finance Corporation of India that provided credit to private enterprise. Mrs. Kennedy was returning the visit made to Washington in 1961 by Prime Minister Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi.

Mrs. Gandhi had accompanied her father on his visits to the United States. "I look forward to renewing an old friendship," she said, upon making her first trip to Washington as Prime Minister in

March 1966, as the guest of President Lyndon B. Johnson. "India and the United States cannot and should not take each other for granted," she said. "As friends committed to common ideals, they can together make this world of ours a better place in which to live.... India is as important to the U.S. as the U.S. is to India." President Johnson referred to her as "a woman with an understanding heart... a leader with a matchless vision."

Touring Asia after the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969, President Nixon spent a delightful 23 hours in New Delhi. He stood up in his open-topped car to wave with both hands at cheering crowds. He hopped out of the car three times, exuberantly shaking outstretched hands as the motorcade wove through New Delhi's roundabouts. Pursuing peace "means building



(From left)
President Ronald
Reagan, First
Lady Nancy
Reagan, Sonia
Gandhi and
Prime Minister
Rajiv Gandhi in
Washington in
June 1985.

MARY ANN FACKELMAN/THE WHITE HOUSE

a structure of stability within which the rights of each nation are respected,” Nixon said during a state dinner attended by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He said the United States “respects the determination of Indians—and their Asian neighbors—to work out their destiny and their security in their own way, emphasizing national independence while accepting the interdependence of nations.” Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reciprocated President Nixon’s visit with a White House meeting in 1971.

It was seven years later that President Jimmy Carter and Prime Minister Morarji Desai signed the Delhi Declaration, in January 1978. It said, “The disparities in economic strength that exist among nations must be bridged and a more equitable international economic order fashioned if we are to secure international peace.” It recognized “the right of each people to determine its own form of government and each nation its own political, social and economic policies” and spoke against war and stockpiles of nuclear and conventional weapons. President Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, were closely surrounded by smiling, hand-shaking, flower-bearing crowds wherever they went, including Daulatpur village, 30 kilometers from New Delhi, which was later renamed Carterpur. President Carter shared a vision of greater agricultural productivity with Prime Minister Desai, who

PRESIDENTS' DAY

Americans traditionally observed two national holidays in February, remembering the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln, born February 12, 1809, and the first U.S. President, George Washington, born February 22, 1732. This changed in 1971, when President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal public holiday, Presidents' Day, to be observed on the third Monday of February, honoring all past U.S. presidents.

toured a soybean farm in Nebraska during his U.S. visit in June 1978.

During the July 1982 visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with President Ronald Reagan, there was a sense of both sides having turned a corner. Mrs. Gandhi described her visit as “an adventure in search of understanding and friendship,” and explained, “No two countries can have the same angle of vision, but each can try to appreciate the points of view of the other. Our effort should be to find a common area, however small, on which to build and to enhance cooperation.” President Reagan responded, “We recognize that there have been differences between our two countries, but these should not obscure all that we have in common, for we are both strong, proud and indepen-

dent nations, guided by our own perceptions of our national interests.”

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President Reagan met in Washington in 1985 and reaffirmed the friendship between the two countries in October 1987, when they drew up an ambitious agenda for still closer cooperation. During the two years between their meetings, bilateral trade had expanded and collaboration between the private sectors had intensified. “We’ve enjoyed cooperation in defense production, notably the Indian light combat aircraft,” said the President. “A memorandum of understanding on technology transfer has been implemented and the United States is working with India to launch its satellites. The U.S.-India Fund for cultural, educational and scientific cooperation has been inaugurated and we’re working together to combat terrorism.”

At that time, the Soviet Union was intact, East-West relations were strained and India was somewhat economically isolated. “Not letting years of irritating estrangement caused by the Cold War get in the way, Ronald Reagan created friendly and productive relationships with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, which opened new opportunities for expanded cooperation and trade between our two nations,” U.S. Ambassador David C. Mulford said of the former President after his death in 2004. “He also laid a strong foundation for U.S.-

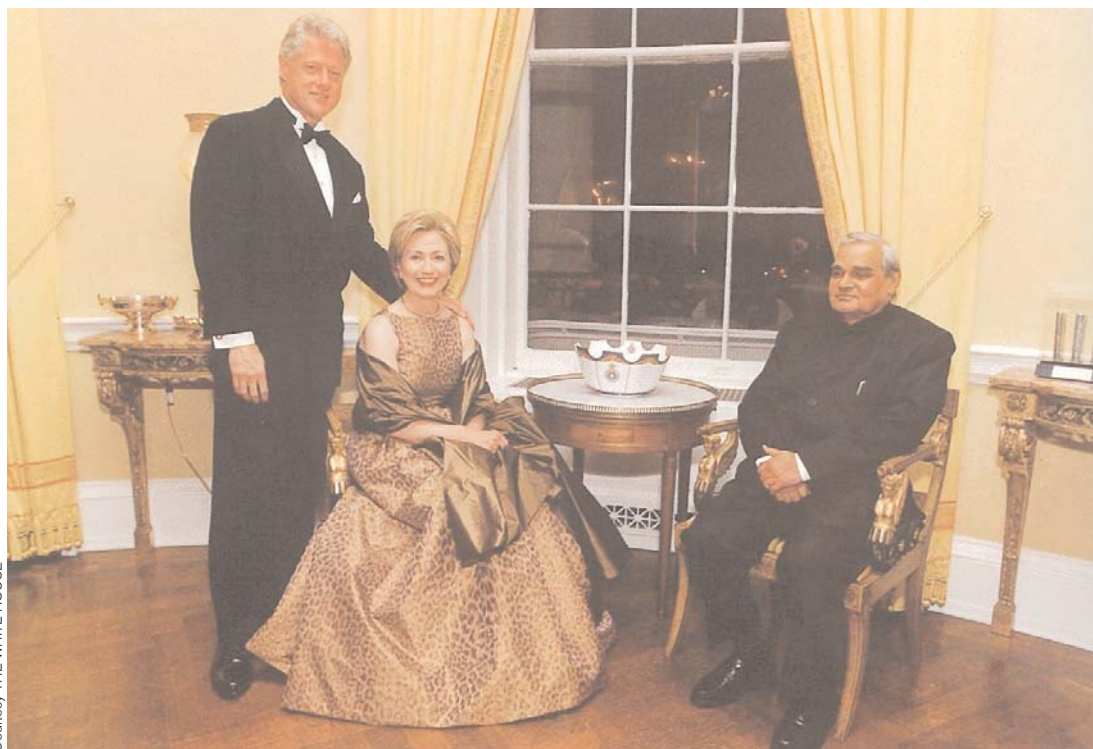


India cooperation in science and technology—the kind of strategic, futuristic vision so characteristic of this man.”

By the time Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao met President Bill Clinton in Washington and visited New York City, Boston and Houston in 1994, there had been significant changes. The American administration was downsizing the U.S. military after the Cold War (a move welcomed by India) and had identified India as one of the 10 most important emerging markets for U.S. exports. The two countries had successfully cooperated in peacekeeping operations. “I think we’ll have a deeper and better partnership now, and I’m looking forward to building on it,” said President Clinton. In a speech at Harvard University, Prime Minister Rao warned against permitting “Cold War attitudes” to block the growing friendship. “This is a decisive opportunity and we miss it at our own peril,” he said.

It took six more years and another serious disagreement—over India’s testing of nuclear weapons and U.S. economic sanctions—before President Clinton was able to visit India in March 2000, and give a major thrust toward the new relationship. He addressed Parliament, made friends and enjoyed the vibrant Indian hospitality across the country, in the company of his daughter, Chelsea. President Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee signed a vision statement, acknowledging

Courtesy THE WHITE HOUSE



there had been times “when our relationship drifted without a steady course,” but resolving to create a closer and qualitatively new relationship between the two countries. “We are nations forged from many traditions and faiths, proving year after year that diversity is our strength,” it said. “In the new century, India and the United States will be partners in peace, with a common interest in and complementary responsibility for ensuring re-

gional and international security.”

A few months later, President Clinton reciprocated, and Prime Minister Vajpayee addressed the U.S. Congress. The quick exchange of visits was a positive step.

“People ask whether the new day in Indo-U.S. relations will continue beyond a new administration,” then-U.S. Ambassador Richard Celeste wrote in a SPAN article. “To me the answer is emphatically yes.” □



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Above: President Bill Clinton, First Lady Hillary Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the White House in September 2000.

Left: President Bill Clinton at Nayla, Rajasthan, in March 2000.

Far left: President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter at Daulatpur, Haryana, in January 1978.